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ON THE JOB WITH ...

Dirty Dogs are a Big Pet Peeve

Posted by Cindy Atoji Keene June 14, 2011 02:49 PM

By Cindy Atoji Keene

Boston's South End has become an epicenter for all things canine. With a seemingly higher dog density than any other quarter of the city, there's the quintessential dog park, of course, as well as a doggie bakery, numerous pet sitting and dog walking services, and doggie daycares. "There's such a great dog population here, that it was an ideal place for a dog spa," said Kathi Molloy, proprietor of Bark Place, a DIY dog wash and pet boutique. Molloy's personal experience revolves around showing and breeding Norwegian Elkhounds, a hardy breed with a hard and coarse coat that requires regular brushing, and when displaying them at dog shows, frequent bathing. "It's harder for the water to penetrate this very furry dog, which has a double coat, so washing them was a killer for my back," said Molloy. "My bathroom was a complete mess." So when Molloy heard about the DIY dog wash concept, an increasing trend in the \$3.51 billion dollar grooming and boarding pet services market, her entrepreneurial vision was honed, and Bark Place was opened two years ago on Washington Street.

Q: Aren't pink toenails for dogs a little over the top?

A: Doing the nails is part of the grooming process, and we'll include that as an optional service. It's hard to do dog's nails, and because we live in the South End, pet owners have to worry about the clicking of nails on wooden floors in condos. As far as nail colors, it's just for fun. When the royal wedding came along, some owners wanted white, red, and black nails to match the colors of Kate and William.

Q: Take us behind the scenes. What goes into the planning of a place like Bark Place?

A: We built from scratch, so we tried to be as green as possible. The flooring in the playroom is made from recycled rubber and is gentle on dog's feet; we built the blow dryers into the wall so they are quieter, and the tubs are accessible without having to lift the dogs into them.

Q: Do you have to do frequent de-skunkings?

A: We don't get a lot of "skunkings" in the city, but there are plenty of other grooming necessities, ranging from mud season mishaps; the pungent combination of salt water, sand, and wet dog after beach days; and dogs rolling in waste at the dog park.

Q: You also offer puppy classes and private training. What motivates owners to enroll?

A: As just one example, the owners of Josie were thrown into a panic when the dog was on a roof deck, and ran away, jumping from one rooftop to another, several stories above ground. Five buildings later, Josie was finally reined in, and later enrolled in class so that the dog would learn to “come when called.”

Q: Is it true that dogs look like their owners?

A: Yes, we have the Pit bull owner with the ink on their arms and a skull and crossbones leash; the frou-frou gal with the Shih Tzu and the little bow in the fur, as well as many others. It’s fun to match the person with the dog.

Q: What are some the hottest trends in the pet industry?

A: All-natural foods and treats is one of the fastest growing segments, as customers pay more attention to what they feed their dogs. Pet owners are reading the list of ingredients on the back of containers, and if protein is not the number one ingredient, they question the quality. “Grain free” is also a trend, as many dogs seem to be allergic to certain grains, similar to the gluten-free movement in human diets. The bottom line is that nothing is too good for pets, as they are considered part of the family.

http://www.boston.com/jobs/news/jobdoc/2011/06/dirty_dogs_are_a_big_pet_peeve.html